

Medicine Sales in King County, WA State, and U.S. (2011) and Estimated Amount of Leftover Medicines

In King County

2011 Population 1,969,722 (28.8% of WA population)

Dollars spent

Estimated dollars spent on prescription drug sales in 2011 ¹	\$ 1,055,605,327
Estimated dollars spent on over-the-counter medicines in 2011 ²	\$ 110,531,520
Estimated total dollars spent on medicines in 2011 in King County	\$ 1,166,136,847

Number of containers

Estimated number of prescription containers sold ¹	22,424,637
Estimated number of over-the-counter containers sold ³	11,053,152
Total number of containers of medicine sold in 2011	33,477,789
Estimated number of containers that go unused each year in King County ⁴	11,148,104

In Washington

2011 Population 6,830,038 (2.2% of US population)

Dollars spent

Total dollars spent on prescription drug sales at retail pharmacies ¹	\$ 3,665,296,275
Estimated dollars spent on over-the-counter medicines ²	\$ 383,790,000
Total dollars spent on medicines in 2011 in Washington	\$ 4,049,086,275

Number of containers

Number of prescription containers sold at retail pharmacies ¹	77,863,323
Estimated number of Over-the-counter containers sold ³	38,379,000
Total number of containers of medicine sold in 2011 in Washington	116,242,323
Estimated number of containers that go unused each year in Washington ⁴	38,708,694

In United States

2011 Population 311,591,917

Number of prescriptions filled at retail pharmacies ¹	3,764,698,318
Total dollars spent on prescription drug sales at retail pharmacies ¹	\$ 227,551,806,436
Total dollars spent on over-the-counter medicines ²	\$ 17,445,000,000
Total dollars spent on medicines in 2011 in United States	\$ 244,996,806,436

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Estimate of Unused Medicine Containers

“About one-third of medicines sold to households in Washington go unused every year”

This statement from the Take Back Your Meds website describes the estimated amount of medicines that are unwanted or expired in households annually. Empirical data is not currently available on the actual number of medicines that go unused every year, but various studies have estimated the amount. This estimate is based on a review of available data sources and estimates, including the following study: Bush, P.J., Sanz, E.J. & Garcia, M. (1996). *Section II: Cross cultural reports. Medicines at Home: the Contents of Medicines Cabinets in Eight Countries*. In Children, Medicines, and Culture. New York, Pharmaceutical Products Press.

Other Estimates of Amount of Leftover Medicines

“Of the more than 4 billion prescriptions written yearly, it is estimated that some 40% go unused.”

Stated on the DisposeMyMeds.org website, a program of the National Community Pharmacists Association that provides information on medicine take-back programs at community pharmacies. Partners listed on the website include the following pharmaceutical companies: Apotex, AstraZeneca, King Pharmaceuticals, and Mallinckrodt.

“For our analysis, it was assumed that 10% of medicine purchased by the patient is unused”

Stated on PhRMA slideset presented by Douglas S. Finan, GlaxoSmithKline; Matthew D. Garamone, Pfizer Inc; and James Jahnke, Schering-Plough Corporation at the Fourth Annual Unused Drug Return Conference (Fall, 2007 in Portland, Maine). In other statements, PhRMA estimates that 3 percent (2.8 million pounds) of prescription medications go unused by U.S. consumers annually (see this statement in report from King Pharmaceuticals http://www.takebacknetwork.com/pdf/Safe_Disposal_of_Unused_Controlled_Substances.pdf).

Sources:

1. Data for prescription medicine sales were obtained from the Kaiser Family Foundation’s statehealthfacts.org website, see 2011 Washington State data for prescriptions filled and sales dollars at: <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?cat=5&sub=66&rgn=49>. Available data is only for prescriptions filled at retail pharmacies, which includes chain pharmacies, independent pharmacies, food stores and mass merchandisers. Prescriptions filled by mail order are not reported. Analysis by Pembroke Consulting found that 17.5% of prescriptions were purchased through mail-order pharmacies in 2009, see <http://www.drugchannels.net/2010/08/new-data-on-pharmacy-industry-market.html>.
Data for the U.S. and Washington State is taken directly from the Kaiser Family Foundation website. They report Washington State is 2.1 percent of U.S. for the total number of retail prescriptions filled at pharmacies, and 1.6 percent of U.S. for total retail sales for prescription medicines sold. King County figures were calculated on a per capita basis from the state data: King County’s population is 28.8 percent of Washington’s total population.
2. Data for over-the-counter (OTC) medicines sales were obtained from the Consumer Healthcare Products Association’s website, see http://www.chpa-info.org/pressroom/Retail_Sales.aspx for 2011 data. The data reported is total dollars spent on OTC medicines in the U.S., which includes personal care products that are regulated as OTC medicines such as toothpaste, sunscreen, and medicated shampoos. The 2011 data reported by CHPA does not include Wal-Mart’s sales for OTC medicines.
3. Data for the number of over-the-counter (OTC) medicine containers (or units) sold in the U.S. is not readily available to our knowledge. This value was calculated from U.S. sales data for OTC medicines reported by the Consumer Healthcare Products Association (see source note #2) by assuming the average cost of each container of OTC medicines is \$10. Washington State figures were adjusted from this U.S. calculation, with Washington State’s 2011 population at 2.2 percent of total U.S. population. King County figures were adjusted from the Washington State calculation, with King County’s population at 28.8 percent of Washington’s population.
4. The estimated amount of leftover containers of medicines was calculated using total number of containers and estimate of one-third of medicines sold to households go unused every year (see statement on page 2, above).
5. Population numbers for 2011 were obtained from U.S. Census Bureau <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html>. United States: 311,591,917. Washington State: 6,830,038. King County: 1,969,722.